Now, we will continue with the discussion on the General Budget.

THE BUDGET (GENERAL) 2002-2003 *(contd.)*

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN (SHRI ADHIK SHIRODKAR): Shri S.S. Chandran. Not present. Shri R.N. Arya. Not present. Shri M.P. Abdussamad Samadani.

SHRI M.P. ABDUSSAMAD SAMADANI (Kerala): Mr. Vice-Chairman, Sir, this year's Budget has evoked a mixed response in a student of economics, like me. Experts on economics may be able to analyse the situation well, and many hon. Members, who spoke here, have enlightened the House on the various aspects of the Budget. Actually, Budget is only a statement showing how much the Government expects to earn and how much it expects to spend. That is generally the Budget. But, in recent years, the Budget has gained more attraction, thanks to the reforms agenda. When we talk about the reform agenda, especially, in the 90s, the Budgets were giving several recommendations, especially those related to reforms. And, in the Budgets of 1994 and 1997, there were many recommendations which had some reform agenda behind them. But, in this year's Budget, while congratulating the hon. Finance Minister on some of its recommendations which are widening and deepening the reforms process, I would like to mention that it has ignored many hot issues which are related to the common man's reforms; especially, on labour reforms, the present Budget does not contain much. There are certain suggestions and recommendations; but the labour reforms have not been given a serious consideration. That is my humble analysis.

Sir, nowadays, the problem is that the Budgets have become an extremely limited instrument of change. I do not know why the economic situation has reached such a stage where the Budgets are sometimes losing its importance. Actually, the Budget should become a very good instrument of change not only in the economic life of the country but also in the social arena of the people. And, the basic goal should be that the enjoyment of the luxurious rich must be used for the common good. When we look at this aspect, I would like to know to what extent the hon. Finance Minister's Budget proposals have gone towards meeting this goal. That is something

to be pondered over, and, may be, the coming years will be able to tell us about this truth much better.

This Budget can be described in one word. It can be described as a sensible, a realistic, Budget. There are many recommendations especially those related to agriculture and industry. But the problem is that, nowadays, the Budgets become over-promising and undelivering. That is our experience. When we look back, for example, to last year's Budget, I would like to cite one example. It failed to meet the revenue and expenditure targets. There is a vast difference between the declaration of the Budget and what actually happens in the following years.

Those proposals were not put into practice. At least, some major items of policy proposals of last year's Budget were not put into practice. The Government is intending to change the labour laws by giving more freedom to the employers to hire and fire. There were very good proposals in last year's Budget. From our experience...

SHRI T.N. CHATURVEDI (Uttar Pradesh) : That is a concession to Shri Jibon Roy.

SHRI M.P. ABDUSSAMAD SAMADANI : Why? ...*(Interruptions)*... Sir, many of the proposals of last year's Budget were not put into practice. It may be due to the prevailing economic condition in the country. Maybe, the Finance Minister has taken into account the condition of the country, but the economic growth has fallen consistently in the last three years, and the fiscal deficit has climbed relentlessly. That is the condition we are facing now.

Sir, I would like to draw the attention of the hon. Finance Minister to one issue relating to umbrellas. I think, he is aware of the problem being faced by the people who are engaged in the manufacture of umbrellas. In this year's Budget, there is a proposal to levy excise duty on umbrellas and parts thereof. Sir, it has created panic among the people of Kerala, especially in those people who are engaged in this industry. As you know, manufacture of umbrellas is confined to assembling of the various components manually. It is giving employment to a large number of people in their house itself. Even power is not required for manufacture of umbrellas. This business has got only a limited scope because it is a

seasonal business. It has grown into a very important industry in Kerala because Kerala has comparatively a longer rainy season than other States. School-going children, women, farmers, working people, all use umbrellas. As you know, umbrella is the cheapest shelter from rain and Sun. The Village industry Commission has also recognised it as a cottage industry. It is one of the important areas of cottage industry, and this levy proposal has come as a shock to this industry. Sir, I would request the hon. finance Minister to reconsider this proposal. In 1994, there was a proposal to levy excise duty on umbrellas, but the then Finance Minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh, withdrew it later on when he came to know about the problems being faced by the people engaged in this industry. Again, in 1997, this proposal came up. The then Finance minister, Shri P. Chidambaram, also withdrew it after understanding the problems being faced by the people engaged in this industry. I hope the same kind of gracious decision will be taken by the hon. Finance minister, taking into account the problems being faced by these people.

Sir, no doubt, the Finance Minister, through his Budget, has resolved many tensions in the economy, by easing upon the fiscal adjustments. At the same time, on the one side, there is hike in the prices of items like kerosene, sugar, urea, etc., which are used by the common people. The principle should be to tax more the wealthy people for the common good of the other people. But it is not being applied on a large scale in this year's Budget. For example, corporate taxes on foreign companies have been reduced; expenditure tax on luxury hotels will no longer be applicable to expenditure, other than room charges only. I don't know why this sort of differentiation is there. Why can't the luxury hotels be taxed, for the common good of the people?

Sir, finally, I would like to draw the attention of the hon. Finance Minister to this issue. This may not be very much related to the present Budget, but every Budget has very serious implications on agriculture.

Sir, I would like to quote from hon. Finance Minister's Budget Speech: "Continue emphasis on agriculture and food economy, enhance public and private investment in infrastructure and strengthen the finance sector and capital markets."

Sir, what is the lot of the farmers? What is the condition faced by the farmers in this country? Especially from my State--from other States, throughout the country, also it is quite a known phenomenon--that agriculture has become the target of all the economic policies. Even for rubber and coconut, which are produced in Kerala, there is a proposal to reduce import duty for rubber from 70% to 35%. But it will not be applicable to sheet rubber, which is 90% of the rubber in Kerala. It is applicable to 10% of latex rubber. This reduction in the Budget will not be helpful to the rubber farmers. In the Budget, there is reduction of import duty on tyres. Then, more tyres will be imported. Quite naturally, rubber farmers will be affected. The tyre products will be affected.

In the Budget, there is no reference to import duty on copra or coconut. Sir, the agricultural situation in our country is such that, I don't think our hon. Finance Minister needs to be enlightened on that. He knows better than me on these things. He works very hard with professional skills. He is dealing with the situation. We know all these things. But what is the condition on the ground? The condition is that the farmers are facing very serious problems. That is affecting each and every field in life, not only economic, but social also.

In Kerala, more than five rupees are to be spent to produce one coconut. But what does a farmer get in return? Hardly Rs.2 or 3. Then who would be ready to cultivate coconut? The word 'Kerala' has the root word, 'kera', which means coconut; it is the land of coconut. If coconut is irrelevant in Kerala, then the social life, the economic life and everything else in Kerala is endangered. What is this condition?

I was shocked to learn from a book seller in a city of Kerala, "Nowadays, books are not being sold." I asked him, "Why?" He said, "Because of agricultural problems and the problems being faced by farmers. They are facing so many problems; and they don't get remunerative price for their produces." It is said that the middle class are more interested in reading and spends a lot of money on books than other classes. If the livelihood itself is in danger, then, who has enough resources to spend on books for reading? This is an important area that has to be looked into.

I don't know why we are going to such an extent. There are many suggestions and many proposals. At least, in this Budget, there are many

proposals related to agriculture. But the net result is, the poor farmers' lot is not reformed. Their problems continue like that.

We are importing so many things from other countries. We have reached such a situation where we are ready even to import pickles. That is the economic policy we are adopting nowadays! Pickle is a simple thing that can be prepared by any Indian lady in two or three minutes. It doesn't need much time or work. It doesn't need many ingredients. But even that is being imported in the country of Gandhiji. If we are compelled to import such items of basic necessity related to our daily meals, then a day will come when the farmers would turn against the politicians of the country, against even the law-making bodies of the country will rise in protest. I am concluding. ...*(Interruptions)*... I am only requesting the hon. Finance Minister that we would be very happy if. ...*(Interruptions)*... I am happy that this is in his mind. His Budget also contains many proposals. In the coming year also, we would expect more from the Finance Minister. Regarding coconut cultivation of Kerala, I would like to submit that we expect something at the time of the reply of the Finance Minister. We hope that the Finance Minister will do something regarding of coconut, rubber and other agricultural produces of Kerala. Sir, I am concluding. One hon. Member was saying something regarding Chiragh. I think he was making a mention regarding kerosene. I am concluding by quoting a couplet regarding *fanoos*.

"फानूस बनकर जिसकी हिफाज़त हवा करे,
वह शमा क्या बुझे जिसे रोशन खुदा करे"

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN (SHRI ADHIK SHIRODKAR): I have one query. Is there any hon. Member who has given his or her name and I have not called out his or her name so far. ...*(Interruptions)*... Okay. ...*(Interruptions)*... I will call out the names. Shri Kapil Sibal, not present; Shri Ramdas Agarwal, not present; Shri Rumandla Ramachandraiah, not present; Shri Virumbi, not present; Shri Rama Shankar Kaushik, not present; Shri Javare Gowda, not present; Shri Sanjay Nirupam, not present; Shri Gandhi Azad, not present; Shri Rajeev Shukla, not present; Shri K. Rahman Khan, not present; Shri Eduardo Faleiro, not present; Shri Lalitbhai Mehta, not present; Miss Mabel Rebello, not present. Hon. Members, the list is exhausted. There is a very famous proverb, 'water, water, water everywhere, but not a drop to drink.'

श्री मूल चन्द मीणा (राजस्थान): इससे पता चलता है कि वे लोग कितने सिंसियर हैं ।

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN (SHRI ADHIK SHIRODKAR): Since the list is exhausted, Mr. Ram Naik is here. I think it would be worthwhile to wait for the hon. Minister because some good news is there. At least, when we go back....*(Interruptions)*...

SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE: Most of the Members want to speak tomorrow. ...*(Interruptions)*... That is why they have just taken leave. .. That is the problem. Anyway, those who are here, they can speak. ...*(Interruptions)*...

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN (SHRI ADHIK SHIRODKAR) : Mr. Ram Naik, the hon. Minister, I am told that you are giving some good news on a burning topic.

THE MINISTER OF PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS (SHRI RAM NAIK): Sir, certainly, I am going to give some good news. This might be a little late for the Rajya Sabha. ...*(Interruptions)*...

श्री दीपांकर मुखर्जी (पश्चिमी बंगाल): उस हाऊस में आपने बीस रुपये कम किया है, 20 और 20 जोड़कर चालीस कर इसे पूरा खत्म कर दीजिए ।

STATEMENT BY MINISTER

Revision in the prices of domestic LPG

THE MINISTER OF PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS (SHRI RAM NAIK): Sir, as the hon. Members are aware, the Finance Minister had, in his Budget Speech, on 28th February, 2002, announced in this August House a reduction in the retail prices of diesel by around 50 paise per litre and of petrol by around Re. 1 per litre. Increases in the retail price of domestic LPG by about Rs.40 per cylinder and of Kerosene oil under Public Distribution System by around Rs.1.50 per litre were also announced. These changes in prices were given effect to by the oil companies with effect from 1st March, 2002.

After the revision in the consumer prices that I have just now mentioned, hon. Prime Minister received representations from various